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Melanie Portland, a volunteer religious-education teacher at St. Patrick's Parish in Victor, helps third-grade students Jordan Siembor (left), Cody Szatkowski (background) and Katherine Schmidt plant bulbs in front of the church's Marian grotto Oct. 28. A new diocesan policy requires volunteers who work with children, teens and vulnerable adults to consent to a code of conduct and submit to criminal background checks.

Volunteers begin training

Sister of St. Joseph Patricia Carroll estimates that 5,000 to 15,000 adults in the Rochester Diocese volunteer to work with children, teens and vulnerable adults in parishes, schools and related organizations. The range in the estimated number of diocesan volunteers is noticeably broad because "we've never really had to stop to survey or do an assessment," said Sister Carroll, assistant superintendent for government services and administration in the diocesan Department of Catholic Schools.

Volunteer accountability will rise substantially beginning this year, in the wake of the sex-abuse scandal that has rocked the U.S. church for the past two years. In order to begin or continue volunteering

through any agency of the Diocese of Rochester, adults now must agree to abide by a code of conduct and submit to criminal background checks.

Among those affected by the new requirements are volunteers for Catholic schools; catechists in faith-formation classes; chaperons at youth-group events; those who train altar servers; baby-sitters during Sunday Masses; coaches for Catholic Youth Organization sports; and adult leaders in Scouting programs sponsored by the diocese. The guidelines also apply to volunteers working with such "vulnerable adults" as nursing-home residents, homebound individuals and the developmentally disabled.

According to diocesan policy, anyone

who does not accept the conditions cannot serve as a volunteer. This requirement applies to all volunteers — from those who have performed a service for decades to those who will first volunteer at some future date; from those who help out regularly to those who will serve on one occasion only; and from those who assist with overnight events to those who work for just one hour at a time.

The new requirements arose from the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, approved in late 2002 by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in response to the sex-abuse scandal. In May 2003 Bishop Matthew H. Clark instituted a Code of Pastoral Conduct that en-

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